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AN INTRODUCTORY READER

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1
INFINITY AND POSSIBILITY

From "The Multiple States of the Being"

To understand the doctrine of the multiplicity of the states of the being, it is necessary before considering anything else to return to the most primordial notion of all, that of metaphysical Infinity, envisaged in its relationship with universal Possibility. The Infinite, according to the etymology of the term which designates it, is that which has no limits; and if we are to preserve this word in its strict sense we must rigorously limit its use to the designation of that which has absolutely no limits whatsoever, excluding here everything that only escapes from certain particular limiting conditions while remaining subject to other limitations by virtue of its very nature, in which these limitations are essentially inherent—as, from the logical point of view which simply translates in its fashion the point of view that can be called 'ontological', are those elements implicated in the very definition of the things in question. As we have already mentioned on many occasions, these latter include number, space, and time, even in the most general and extended conceptions we can possibly form of them, which far exceed our ordinary notions;[1] all of this can really only be in the domain

1 It should be observed that we are careful to say 'general' and not 'universal', for here it is nothing more than a question of the particular conditions of certain states of existence, which should suffice to show that there is no question of

of the indefinite. It is to this indefinitude, when it is of a quantitative order as in the examples just mentioned, that some people improperly apply the term ‘mathematical infinity’, as if adding a fixed epithet or qualification to the word ‘infinity’ did not itself imply a contradiction pure and simple.[2] In fact, this indefinitude, proceeding from the finite of which it is merely an extension or a development (and therefore always reducible to the finite), has no common measure with the true Infinite, any more than an individuality, human or otherwise, even considered with the integrality of the indefinite prolongations of which it is capable, can ever be commensurate with the total being.[3] This formation of the indefinite from the finite, of which we have a very clear example in the production of the series of numbers, is only possible on condition that the finite already contain the indefinite potentially, and even were the limits extended so far as to be lost to sight, so to speak—that is, to the point at which they escape our ordinary means of measurement—they certainly are not abolished thereby; by reason of the very nature of the causal relation it is quite obvious that the ‘greater’ cannot come from the ‘lesser’, nor the Infinite from the finite.

It cannot be otherwise when, as in the present case,

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infinity since these conditions are obviously as limited as the states to which they apply, and which they help to define.

2 If we sometimes speak of a ‘metaphysical Infinite’ in order to indicate more precisely that it is by no means a question of the so-called mathematical infinite, or other ‘counterfeits of the Infinite’ (if we may put it so), such an expression in no way falls under the objection just raised, because the metaphysical order is in fact unlimited, so that it contains no determination but is on the contrary the affirmation of that which surpasses all determination, whereas one who says ‘mathematical thereby restricts the conception in question to a particular and limited domain, that of quantity.

3 See The Symbolism of the Cross, chaps. 26 and 30.

we consider various orders of particular possibilities that are manifestly limited by the coexistence of other orders of possibilities, and thus limited by virtue of their own nature to such and such determined possibilities and no others, and not to all possibilities without restriction. If it were not so, the coexistence of an indefinitude of other possibilities not included in these, each of which is equally susceptible of an indefinite development, moreover, would be an impossibility and thus an absurdity in the logical sense of the word.[4] The Infinite on the contrary, to be truly such, cannot admit of any restriction, which presupposes that it be absolutely unconditioned and undetermined, for every determination, of whatever sort, is necessarily a limitation by the very fact that it must leave something outside of itself, namely all other equally possible determinations. Besides, limitation presents the character of a veritable negation; to set a limit is to deny to that which is limited everything that this limit excludes, and consequently the negation of a limit is properly the negation of a negation, that is to say, logically, and even mathematically, an affirmation, so that in reality the negation of all limit is equivalent to total and absolute affirmation. That which has no limits is that of which nothing can be denied, and is therefore what contains everything, that outside of which there is nothing; and this idea of the Infinite, which is thus the most affirmative of all because it comprehends or embraces all particular affirmations whatsoever, can only be expressed in negative terms by reason of its

4 The absurd, in the logical and mathematical sense, is that which implies contradiction; it is therefore identical with the impossible, for it is the absence of internal contradiction that defines possibility, logically as well as ontologically.

absolute indetermination. In language, any direct affirmation is in fact necessarily a particular and determined affirmation—the affirmation of something particular—whereas total and absolute affirmation is no particular affirmation to the exclusion of others since it implies them all equally; and from this it should be easy to grasp the very close relation this presents with universal Possibility, which in the same way comprehends all particular possibilities.[5] The idea of the Infinite we have just presented[6] from the purely metaphysical point of view can be neither discussed nor contested, for by the very fact that it contains nothing negative it cannot contain any contradiction —and this is all the more necessarily so, logically speaking,[7] since it is negation that would occasion contradiction.[8] If in fact one envisages the "Whole' in the universal and absolute sense, it is evident that it cannot be limited in any way, for it could only be so in virtue of something exterior to it, and if anything were exterior to it, it would not be the

5 On the use of negative terms of which the real meaning, however, is essentially affirmative, see Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines, pt. 2, chap. 8, and Man and His Becoming, chap. 15.

6 We do not say 'defined', for it would obviously be contradictory to try to give a definition of the Infinite; and we have shown elsewhere that the metaphysical point of view itself, by reason of its universal and unlimited character, is not susceptible of definition either (Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines, pt. 2, chap. 5).

7 We must distinguish this logical necessity, which is the impossibility of a thing's not being or being other than it is—and this independently of any particular condition—from what is called 'physical' necessity or necessity of fact, which is simply the impossibility that beings and things could fail to conform to the laws of the world to which they belong, this latter kind of necessity consequently being subordinate to the conditions by which that world is defined, and which are valid only within the special domain concerned.

8 Some philosophers, having rightly argued against the so-called 'mathematical infinite, and having exposed all the contradictions that this idea implies (contradictions that disappear moreover as soon as one recognizes that here it is only a matter of the indefinite), believe they have also proved thereby the impossibility of the metaphysical Infinite, but all that is proved by this confusion is their total ignorance of what the latter implies.

‘Whole’. It is important to observe moreover that the “Whole’ in this sense must not in any way be likened to a particular or determined whole, that is, to a totality composed of parts that would stand in a definite relationship to it; properly speaking, it is ‘without parts, for these parts would of necessity be relative and finite and so could have no common measure with it, and consequently no relationship with it, which amounts to saying that they would not exist for it,[9] and this suffices to show that one should not try to form any particular conception of it.[10]

What we have just said of the universal Whole in its most absolute indetermination also applies to it when it is envisaged from the point of view of Possibility; and in truth there is no determination here either, or at least only the minimum required to render it actually conceivable to us, and above all expressible to some degree. As we have already had occasion to observe,[11] a limitation of total Possibility is properly speaking an impossibility, since to limit it one would have to conceive it, and what is outside of the possible can be nothing but the impossible; but since an impossibility is a negation pure and simple, a true nothingness, it

9 In other words, the finite, even if capable of indefinite extension, is always strictly nil with respect to the Infinite; consequently, neither any thing nor any being can be considered a ‘part of the Infinite’, this being one of the erroneous conceptions belonging properly to *pantheism for the very use of the word ‘part’ implies the existence of a definite relationship with the whole..

10 Above all one must avoid conceiving of the universal Whole in the fashion of an arithmetical sum obtained by the addition of its parts taken successively, one by one. Besides, even where a particular whole is concerned, there are two cases to be distinguished from one another: a true whole is logically anterior to its parts and independent of them, whereas a whole conceived as logically posterior to its parts, of which it is merely the sum, in fact only constitutes what the Scholastic philosophers called the ens rationis, whose existence as a ‘whole’ depends on the condition of actually being thought of as such. The first case contains in itself a real principle of unity, superior to the multiplicity of its parts, whereas the second has no other unity than that which our thought attributes to it.

11 The Symbolism of the Cross, chap. 14.

can obviously not limit anything whatsoever, from which it immediately follows that universal Possibility is necessarily unlimited. We must take great care, however, to understand that this applies only to universal and total Possibility, which is thus only what we could call an aspect of the Infinite, from which it is in no way and in no measure distinct; nothing can be outside the Infinite, for if something were, the infinite would be limited and so no longer the Infinite. The conception of a ‘plurality of infinites’ is absurd because these ‘infinities would mutually limit each other, and so in reality none of them would be infinite;[12] when we say therefore that universal Possibility is infinite or unlimited, it must be understood that it is nothing other than the Infinite itself envisaged under a certain aspect—insofar as it is permissible to say that there are aspects to the Infinite. Since the Infinite is truly ‘without parts, strictly speaking there could be no question of a multiplicity of aspects really and ‘distinctively’ inhering in it; in fact it is we who conceive the Infinite under this or that aspect because we cannot do otherwise, and even if our conception were not essentially limited—as it is so long as we are in an individual state—it would necessarily have to limit itself, for to become expressible, it must assume a determinate form. What matters is that we should clearly understand whence the limitation comes and on what it depends, so that we attribute it only to our own imperfection, or rather to that of the exterior and interior faculties currently at our disposal as individual beings, which as such effectively possess only a definite and conditioned existence, and do not

12 Ibid., chap. 24.

transfer this imperfection, which is as purely contingent and transitory as are the conditions to which it refers and from which it results, to the unlimited domain of universal Possibility itself. And, finally, let us add that if one speaks correlatively of the Infinite and Possibility, it is not with the intention of establishing between these terms a distinction which could not in fact exist, but rather because here the Infinite is being envisaged particularly in its active aspect while Possibility is its passive aspect.[13] Now whether we regard it as active or passive, it is always the Infinite which cannot be affected by these contingent points of view, and the determinations, whatever may be the principle by which they are effected, only exist in relation to our own conception. In short, this is what we have elsewhere called ‘active perfection’ (Khien) and ‘passive perfection’ (Khouen), following the terminology of the Far-Eastern doctrine, perfection in its absolute sense being identical with the Infinite understood in all its indetermination; and as we said at the time, this is analogous—though to another degree and from a more universal point of view—to what in Being are called ‘essence’ and ‘substance’[14]

For what follows it must be well understood that Being does not contain the whole of Possibility, and that consequently it can in no wise be identified with the Infinite; this is why we say that our point of view here is far more universal than that from which we envisage Being alone. We mention this only to avoid all confusion, for in what follows we shall have occasion to explain this point more fully.

13 These are the Brahma and Shakti of Hindu doctrine (see Man and His Becoming, chaps. 5 and 10).

14 See The Symbolism of the Cross, chap. 24.

2
QUALITY AND QUANTITY

From "The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times"

Quality and quantity are fairly generally regarded as complementary terms, although the profound reason for their complementarism is often far from being understood, this reason lying in the 'polar' correspondence referred to toward the end of the introduction to this book. This, the first of all cosmic dualities, is a starting-point, for it is situated at the very principle of existence or of universal manifestation, and without it no manifestation would be possible in any mode whatsoever: it is the duality of Purusha and Prakriti according to the Hindu doctrine, or to use another terminology, that of 'essence' and 'substance'. Its two terms must be envisaged as universal principles, and as being the two poles of all manifestation; but, at another level, or rather at a number of different levels (for there are many levels, corresponding to the more or less particularized domains that can be envisaged in the interior of universal manifestation), these two terms can also be used analogically and in a relative sense to designate that which corresponds to the two principles, or most directly represents them with reference to a particular more or less limited mode of manifestation. Thus it is that essence and substance can be spoken of in relation either to a world, that is

to say to a state of existence determined by certain special conditions, or in relation to a being considered as a separate entity, or even to each of the states of that being, that is to say, to its manifestation in each of the degrees of existence; in this last case, there is naturally a correspondence between what essence and substance represent in the microcosm and what they represent, considered from a macrocosmic point of view, in the world in which the manifestation of the being is situated; in other words, they are then only particularizations of the relative principles that are the determinations of universal essence and substance in relation to the conditions of the world in question. Understood in this relative sense, and especially with reference to particular beings, essence and substance are in effect the same as the 'form' and 'matter' of the scholastic philosophers; but it is better to avoid the use of these latter terms because, doubtless owing to an imperfection of the Latin language in this connection, they only convey rather inaccurately the ideas they ought to express[1], and also because they have lately become even more equivocal by reason of the quite different meaning commonly assigned to them in current speech. However that may be, to say that every manifested being is a composite of 'form' and 'matter' amounts to saying that its existence necessarily proceeds simultaneously from both essence and sub- stance, and consequently that there is in each being something corresponding both to the one and to the other of these two principles, in such a way that the being is as it were a resultant of their union, or to speak more exactly, a resultant of the

1 These words translate in a rather unsatisfactory way the Greek terms εἶδος and ὕλη employed in the same sense by Aristotle. These terms will be referred to again later.

action exercised by the active principle, Essence, on the passive principle, Substance; and if consideration is confined to the special case of individual beings, the ‘form’ and the ‘matter’ that constitute those beings are respectively identical with what the Hindu tradition designates as nama and rupa. While on the subject of concordances between different terminologies, thus perhaps incidentally enabling some people to translate the explanations given into a language to which they are more accustomed, it may be added that the Aristotelian designations ‘act’ and ‘potency’ also correspond to essence and substance. Aristotle’s terms are susceptible of a more extended application than are the terms ‘form’ and ‘matter’, but to say that there is in every being a mixture of act and potency comes back to the same thing in the end, for act is that in him by which he participates in essence, and potency is that in him by which he participates in substance; pure act and pure potency could not exist anywhere in manifestation, since they are true equivalents of universal essence and substance. Provided that this is clearly understood, it is possible to speak of the Essence and of the Substance of our world, that is, of the world that is the domain of the individual human being, and it can be said that in conformity with the particular conditions that define this world as such, these two principles appear in it under the aspects of quality and of quantity respectively. This may appear evident at first sight so far as quality is concerned, since essence is the principial synthesis of all the attributes that belong to a being and make that being what it is, and since attributes and qualities are really synonymous: and it may be observed that quality, considered as the

content of Essence, if such an expression be allowable, is not exclusively confined to our world, but is susceptible of a transposition that universalizes its significance. There is nothing remarkable in this, since Essence represents the superior principle; but in any such universalization quality ceases to be the correlative of quantity, for quantity, unlike quality, is strictly linked up with the special conditions of our world; furthermore, from a theological point of view, is not quality in some way brought into relation with God himself when his attributes are spoken of, whereas it would be manifestly inconceivable to pretend to assign to him any sort of corresponding quantitative determination.[2] To this the objection might perhaps be raised that Aristotle ranks quality as well as quantity among his 'categories', which are only special modes of the being and not coextensive with it; he does so however without effecting the transposition previously mentioned, indeed he has no need to effect it, for the enumeration of his 'categories' relates only to our world and to its conditions, in such a way that quality cannot be and is not really meant to be understood otherwise than in a sense that is more immediate for us in our state as individuals, the sense in which, as explained earlier, it appears as a correlative of quantity. It is of interest to note on the other hand that the 'form' of the scholastics is what Aristotle calls εἶδος, and that this latter word is also used to mean 'species', which is properly speaking a nature or an essence common to an indefinite multitude of individuals. Specific nature is of a purely qualitative order, for it is truly

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2 It is possible to speak of Brahma saguna or 'qualified', but there can be no possible question of Brahma 'quantified'.

'innumerable' in the strict sense of the word, that is to say it is independent of quantity, being indivisible and entire in every individual belonging to the species, so that it is quite unaffected by the number of those individuals, 'plus' or 'minus' not being applicable to it. Moreover, εἶδος is etymologically the 'idea', not only in the modern psychological sense, but also in an ontological sense nearer than is ordinarily supposed to the sense in which Plato uses it, for whatever may be the real differences in this connection between the conceptions of Plato and of Aristotle, as so often happens they have been greatly exaggerated by disciples and commentators. The Platonic ideas are also essences; Plato gives expression chiefly to the transcendent aspect and Aristotle to the immanent aspect, but this does not imply incompatibility; independently of any conclusions to which the 'systematic' spirit may lead, it is only a matter of a difference of level; in any case, they are always considering 'archetypes' or the essential principles of things, such principles representing what may be called the qualitative side of manifestation. Furthermore, the Platonic ideas, under another name and by direct filiation, are the same thing as the Pythagorean numbers; and this shows clearly that although the Pythagorean numbers are, as already indicated, called numbers analogically, they are in no way numbers in the ordinary quantitative sense of the word; they are on the contrary purely qualitative, corresponding inversely on the side of essence to what the quantitative numbers are on the side of substance.[3] On the other

3 It may be observed that the name of a being, insofar as it is an expression of its essence, is properly speaking a number understood in this qualitative sense; and this establishes a close link between the;.conception of the Pythagorean

hand, when Saint Thomas Aquinas says that *numerus stat ex parte materiae* he is speaking of quantitative number, thereby affirming decisively that quantity has an immediate connection with the substantial side of manifestation. The word 'substantial' is used here because materia in the scholastic sense is not by any means the same as 'matter' as understood by modern physicists, but is properly 'substance', whether that word be taken in its relative meaning, as when it is put into correlation with forma and referred to particular beings, or whether it be taken, when materia prima is in question, as the passive principle of universal manifestation, that is, as pure potentiality, and so as the equivalent of Prakriti in the Hindu doctrine. However, as soon as 'matter' is in question, in whatever sense the word be taken, everything becomes particularly obscure and confused, and doubtless not without reason[4] and therefore, while it has been possible to give an adequate account of the relation of quality to essence without developing a long argument, it will be necessary to go more deeply into the relation between quantity and substance in order to present a clear picture of the various aspects assumed by the Western conception of 'matter' even before the advent of the modern deviation in which this word was destined to play so great a part: and it is all the more necessary to do so because this question is in a sense at the very

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numbers - and consequently that of the Platonic ideas - and the use of the Sanskrit word nama to denote the essential side of a being.

4 It must be pointed out, in connection with essence and substance, that the scholastics often translate as substantia the Greek word οὐσία, which on the contrary means properly and literally 'essence', and this contributes not a little to the growth of linguistic confusion; hence such expressions as 'substantial form' for instance, this expression being very ill adapted to convey the idea of that which really constitutes the essential side of a being and not its substantial side.

root of the principal subject of this study.

3
THE DEGREES OF INDVIDUAL MANIFESTATION

From "Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta"

We must now pass on to consider the different degrees of the manifestation of Ātmā, regarded as the personality, insofar as this manifestation constitutes human individuality; and it may indeed literally be said to constitute it, since this individuality would enjoy no existence at all if it were separated from its principle, that is to say from the personality. The expression just used calls, however, for one reservation; by the manifestation of Ātmā must be understood manifestation referred to Ātmā as its essential principle, but it must not be inferred from this that Ātmā manifests itself in some way, since it never enters into manifestation, as we have previously stated, and that is why it is not in any way affected thereby. In other words, Ātmā is 'that by which all things are manifested, and which is not itself manifested by anything'[1] and it is this point which must never be lost sight of throughout all that follows. We will repeat once more that Ātmā and Purusha are one and the same principle, and that it is from Prakriti and not from Purusha that all manifestation is produced; but if the Sāṇkhya,

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1 Kena Upanishad 1.5-9;

because its point of view is chiefly ‘cosmological’ and not strictly speaking metaphysical, sees this manifestation as the development or ‘actualization’ of the potentialities of Prakriti, the Vedanta necessarily sees it quite differently, because it regards Ātmā, which is outside any change or ‘becoming’, as the true principle to which everything must ultimately be referred. It might be said that, viewed in this manner, the Sāṇkhya and the Vedantā represent respectively the points of view of ‘substance’ and of ‘essence’, and that the first can be called a ‘cosmological’ point of view, because it is that of Nature and of ‘becoming’; but, on the other hand, metaphysics does not limit itself to ‘essence’ regarded as the correlative of ‘substance’, nor even to Being, in which these two terms are unified; it extends much further, since it attains to Paramātmā or Purushottama, which is the Supreme Brahma, and therefore its point of view (assuming that such an expression is still applicable here) is truly unlimited.

Furthermore, when we speak of the different degrees of individual manifestation, it should be readily understood that they correspond with the degrees of universal manifestation, by reason of the basic analogy between the ‘macrocosm’ and the ‘microcosm’ to which we have already alluded. This will be still better understood if one remembers that all manifested beings alike are subject to the general conditions which limit the states of existence in which they are placed; if we cannot, when considering any given being, really isolate one state of that being from the whole composed of all the other states among which it is situated hierarchically at a given level, no more can we, from another point

of view, isolate that state from all that belongs, not to the same being, but to the same degree of universal Existence; and thus all appears linked together in various different ways, both within manifestation itself, and also insofar as the latter, forming a single whole in its indefinite multiplicity, is attached to its principle, that is, to Being, and through Being to the Supreme Principle. Multiplicity, once it is a possibility, exists according to its own mode, but this mode is illusory, in the sense we have already ascribed to that word (that of a lesser reality), because the very existence of this multiplicity is based upon unity, from which it is derived and within which it is principially contained. When viewing the whole of universal manifestation in this manner, we may say that in the very multiplicity of its degrees and of its modes 'Existence is one,' according to a formula borrowed from Islamic esoterism; furthermore, there is a fine distinction which it is important to note here as between 'unicity' and 'unity': the first embraces multiplicity as such while the second is its principle (not its 'root', in the sense in which this word is applied to Prakriti only, but as containing within itself, 'essentially' as well as 'substantially', all the possibilities of manifestation). It can therefore correctly be said that Being is one, and that it is Unity itself[2] in the metaphysical sense, however, and not in the mathematical sense, for at this stage we have passed quite outside the domain of quantity. Between metaphysical Unity and mathematical unity there is analogy but not identity; and similarly, when we speak of the multiplicity of universal manifestation, it is again not with a quantitative multiplicity that

2 The same idea is expressed by the Scholastic adage: Esse et unum convertuntur

we are concerned, for quantity is merely a special condition of certain manifested states. Finally, if Being is one, the Supreme Principle is ‘without duality’, as we shall see in what follows: Unity is indeed the first of all determinations, but it is already a determination, and, as such, it cannot properly be applied to the Supreme Principle.

Having given these few indispensable explanations, let us return to the consideration of the degrees of manifestation. It is necessary, as we have seen, to draw a distinction first of all between formless and formal manifestation; but when we confine our attention to the individuality, it is always exclusively with the latter that we are concerned. The human state properly so called, like every other individual state, belongs wholly to formal manifestation, since it is precisely the presence of form among the conditions contributing to make up a particular mode of existence which characterizes that mode as individual. If, therefore, we have to consider a formless element, it will also necessarily be a supra-individual element, and, as regards its relationship with human individuality, it must never be considered as constitutive of it, nor for any reason at all as forming a part of it, but as linking the individuality to the personality. The personality, indeed, is unmanifested, even insofar as it is regarded more especially as the principle of the manifested states, just as Being, although it is properly the principle of universal manifestation, remains outside of and beyond that manifestation (and we may recall Aristotle’s ‘unmoved mover’ at this point); on the other hand, formless manifestation is also, in a relative sense, principial in relation to formal

manifestation, and thus it establishes a link between the latter and its higher unmanifested principle, which is, moreover, the common principle of these two orders of manifestation. Similarly, if we distinguish, in formal or individual manifestation, between the subtle and the gross state, the first is, more relatively still, principial in relation to the second, and hence placed hierarchically between it and formless manifestation. We have, therefore, through a series of principles becoming progressively more relative and determined, a chain at once logical and ontological (the two points of view, moreover, corresponding in such a way that they can only be separated artificially) extending from the unmanifested downward to gross manifestation, passing through the intermediary of formless manifestation and then of subtle manifestation; and, whether we are dealing with the ‘macrocosm’ or with the ‘microcosm’, such is the general order which must be followed in the development of the possibilities of manifestation. The elements about which we shall now be speaking are the tattvas enumerated by the sāṇkhya, with the exception, of course, of the first and the last, that is, of Prakriti and Purusha. We have seen that, among these tattvas, some are regarded as ‘productive productions and others as ‘unproductive productions’. A question therefore suggests itself in this connection: is this division equivalent to the division we have just specified in respect of the degrees of manifestation, or does it not at least roughly correspond with it? For example, if we limit ourselves to the point of view of individuality, we might be inclined to refer the tattvas of the first group to the subtle state and those of the second to the gross

state, the more so since, in a certain sense, subtle manifestation is productive of gross manifestation, while the latter is not productive of any further state: but the answer is not really quite so simple. In point of fact, in the first group we have Buddhi first of all, which is the formless element to which we were alluding just now; as to the other tattvas which are included with it, ahaṇkāra and the tanmātras, they do indeed belong to the domain of subtle manifestation. Again, in the second group, the bhūtas incontestably belong to the domain of gross manifestation, since they are the corporeal elements: but manas, not being corporeal, must, in itself at least, be referred to subtle manifestation, although its activity is also exercised in relation to gross manifestation; while the other indriyas have in some sort a twofold aspect, being conceivable at the same time as faculties and as organs, psychically as well as corporeally therefore, which is also to say both in the subtle and in the gross state. It must, moreover, be clearly understood that that part of subtle manifestation which is taken into consideration in all these circumstances is really only the portion affecting the human individual state in its extra-corporeal modalities; and, superior as these may be to the corporeal modality, inasmuch as they contain its immediate principle (their domain extending at the same time much further), nevertheless, if we situate them in the totality of universal Existence, they still belong to that degree of Existence in which the human state as a whole is situated. The same remark also applies when we say that subtle manifestation is productive of gross manifestation: for this to be strictly accurate, however, it is necessary, in the case of the former,

to apply the restriction we have just mentioned, since the same relationship cannot be established in respect of those other states which, though likewise individual states, are not human states and therefore differ entirely as to their conditions (other than the condition imposed by the presence of form); for those states must nevertheless also be included in subtle manifestation, as we have already explained, from the moment that we accept the human individuality as a term of comparison as we must inevitably do, while clearly bearing in mind that the human individual state is really neither more nor less important than any other state whatsoever.

One last observation is called for; in speaking of the order of development of the possibilities of manifestation, or of the order in which the elements corresponding to the different phases of this development should be enumerated, great care must be taken to explain that such an order implies a purely logical succession, signifying, however, a real ontological connection, and that there cannot be any question at all here of a temporal succession. Development in time, indeed, only corresponds with a special condition of existence, which is one of those conditions defining the domain in which the human state is contained; and there is an indefinite number of other modes of development equally possible, and included also within universal manifestation. Human individuality cannot therefore be related in the order of time to other states of the being, since these, in a general way, are extra-temporal: and that is also true even when it is only a question of states which likewise belong to formal manifestation. It might further be added that certain extensions of the

human individuality, outside its corporeal modality, are already freed from time, without on that account being exempt from the general conditions of the state to which this individuality belongs; these extensions are really situated in mere prolongations of that state, and we shall doubtless have occasion in other studies to explain just how such prolongations may be reached through the suppression of one or other of the conditions which together contribute to make up the corporeal world. Such being the case, it is all the more apparent that there cannot be any question of the temporal condition applying outside this same state, nor, consequently, of its governing the relation of the integral human state with other states; and this is even less admissible when it is a question of a principle common to all the states of manifestation, or of an element which, though indeed manifested, is nevertheless superior to all formal manifestation, as is the element to be considered next.

4
THE ETERNAL IDEAS

From "Études Traditionelles"
Included in "Symbols of Sacred Science"

In [*Symbols of Sacred Science, ch. 2*] we remarked, with regard to the assimilation of Spirit to Intellect, that it is considered altogether admissible to speak of the 'Divine Intellect', which obviously implies a transposition of the term beyond the domain of manifestation. But this point calls for further attention, for it is precisely here that is to be found the very basis for the assimilation in question. We will note at the outset that, in this respect also, standpoints can be taken at different levels, according to whether one stops short at the consideration of Being alone or whether one goes beyond Being. Needless to say, when theologians consider the Divine Intellect or the Word as the 'place of Possibilities', they have in view possibilities of manifestation only, which as such are comprised in Being. The transposition which permits the passage from Being to the Supreme Principle no longer pertains to the domain of theology, but solely to pure metaphysics.

It might be asked if this conception of the Divine Intellect and that of the 'intelligible world' of Plato are identical; or, in other words, whether the 'Ideas' understood in a Platonic sense, are the same as those contained eternally in the Word. It is clearly a

question of the ‘archetypes’ of manifested beings in both cases. It would seem, however, at least at first glance, that the ‘intelligible world’ corresponds to supra-formal manifestation rather than to pure Being; in other words, according to Hindu terminology, it would be Buddhi envisaged in the Universal order rather than Ātmā, even in a perspective that limits Ātmā to pure Being. It goes without saying that both these points of view are perfectly legitimate.[1] But if such is the case, the Platonic ‘ideas’ cannot strictly be called ‘eternal’, because this word cannot be applied to anything that belongs to manifestation, even at its loftiest degree and at the level closest to the Principle, while the ideas contained in the Word are necessarily eternal as He is, everything in the Principial order being absolutely permanent and admitting no kind of succession.[2] Notwithstanding this, it seems to us probable that the passage from one of these points of view to the other must always have remained possible for Plato himself, as indeed it is in reality. We will not insist on this further, however, preferring to leave to others the task of examining this question more closely, the interest of which is after all more historical than doctrinal.

What is rather strange is that some people seem to

1 Perhaps it is not without interest to mention that the ‘idea’ or the ‘archetype’, considered at the level of supra-formal manifestation and in relation to each being, corresponds in fact, despite the different mode of expression, to the Catholic conception of the ‘guardian angel’. [In the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, creatures come forth from God firstly into angelic intellect, and secondly into individual existence. Tr.]

2 We do not distinguish here between the domain of Being and That which is beyond, for it is obvious that possibilities of manifestation, viewed especially as they are contained in Being, do not really differ in any way from these same possibilities in so far as they are contained along with all others in Total Possibility. All the difference is only in the viewpoint or ‘level’ at which one places oneself, according to whether or not one considers these possibilities in relation to manifestation itself.

consider the eternal ideas as mere ‘virtualities’ in relation to the manifested beings of which these ideas are actually the principial archetypes. There is an illusion here which is no doubt due to the profane distinction between the ‘possible’ and the ‘real’, a distinction which, as we have explained elsewhere,[3] could not have the least value from a metaphysical perspective. This illusion is all the more grave in that it involves a genuine contradiction, and it is difficult to understand why it is not perceived. In fact, there can be nothing virtual whatsoever in the Principle, but on the contrary, only the permanent actuality of all things in an ‘eternal present’; and it is this actuality which constitutes the sole basis of all existence. Nevertheless, there are those who carry the mistake so far that they seem to look on the eternal ideas only as kinds of images—which, let it be noted in passing, implies yet another contradiction, that of seeking to introduce something of a formal nature even into the Principle—images that have, with manifested beings themselves, a relation that is no more real than would be their image reflected in a mirror. That is, strictly speaking, a complete reversal of the relationship of the Principle with manifestation, and it is too obvious to need further explanation. The truth is indeed remote from these erroneous conceptions. The idea in question here is the very principle of the being: it is that which gives it all its reality and without which it would be only nothingness pure and simple. To maintain the contrary amounts to severing all links between the manifested being and the Principle; and if at the same time a real existence be attributed to this being,

3 See The Multiple States of Being, ch. 2.

this existence is and cannot be anything other than independent of the Principle so that, as we have said on another occasion,[4] it all inevitably ends in the error of ‘association’. Once it is recognised that the existence of manifested beings, in all their positive reality, can only be a ‘participation’ in principial Being, then there cannot be the least doubt about this matter. If the ‘participation’ and the asserted ‘virtuality’ of the eternal ideas should both be admitted at the same time, that would be yet another contradiction. In fact, what is virtual is in no way our reality in the Principle, but only the consciousness we have of it as manifested beings, which obviously is something altogether different; and it is only by metaphysical realisation that our consciousness of our true being, which is beyond and above all becoming, can be made effective, that is, actualised into the consciousness not of something that might pass from ‘potency’ to ‘act’, but rather of that which we are principially and eternally, and this in the most absolutely real sense possible.

Now to relate what we have said about the eternal ideas to that which concerns the manifested Intellect, we must naturally turn once again to the sūtrātmā doctrine, however it may be expressed, for the different symbolisms traditionally used for this purpose are basically equivalent. Returning, then, to the representation we used previously, it can be said that the Divine Intellect is the Spiritual Sun, while the manifested intellect is a ray[5] of the Sun; and there can

4 See Symbols of Sacred Science, ch. 64.

5 Moreover, this ray will be single in so far as Buddhi is envisaged in the Universal order (it is then the ‘sole foot of the Sun’ of which the Hindu tradition speaks), but it is multiplied indefinitely in appearance in relation to particular beings (the sushumna ray by which each being, in whatever state it may be situated, is permanently linked to the Spiritual Sun).

be no more discontinuity between the Principle and manifestation than there is between the Sun and its rays.[6] It is by the Intellect, therefore, that every being in all its states of manifestation, is attached directly to the Principle, and this is because the Principle, insofar as it eternally contains the 'truth' of all beings, is itself not other than the Divine Intellect.[7]

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6 It is these rays which, according to the symbolism we have used elsewhere, realise manifestation in 'measuring' it by their actual expansion from the Sun (see The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times, ch. 3).

7 In terms of the Islamic tradition, al-haqīqah or the 'truth' of every being whatsoever lies in the Divine Principle inasmuch as this Principle is itself al-Haqq or the 'Truth' in the absolute sense.

5
WORD AND SYMBOL

"Published in Regnabit, January 1926, with reference to an article by the Rev Felix Anizan entitled, 'If We Knew How to Look' (in the November 1925 issue of the same journal), which insisted particularly on the importance and the value of the symbol of the Sacred Heart." - from Symbols of Sacred Science

We have previously had occasion to speak of the importance of symbolic forms in the transmission of traditional doctrinal teachings.[1] We return to this subject in order to bring to it some complementary explanations and to show yet more explicitly the different points of view from which it can be looked at.

First of all, symbolism seems to us to be quite specially adapted to the needs of human nature, which is not exclusively intellectual but which needs a sensory basis from which to rise to higher levels. The human composite must be taken as it is,

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1 [Cf., Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines, Part II, chapter 7; and L'Esoterisme de Dante, 1925 (and later editions). After writing this present article, René Guénon often returned, in other books and articles, to the doctrine on which symbolism is based, especially in The Symbolism of the Cross, and in Aperçus sur l'Initiation, ch. 16-18.)

simultaneously one and multiple in its real complexity; this is what tends to be forgotten ever since Descartes claimed to establish a radical and absolute separation between soul and body. Pure intelligences which are nothing other than intelligence certainly need no outward form and no expression in order to understand the truth, nor do they need them even for communicating to other pure intelligences what has been understood in the measure that this is communicable; but it is not so for man. Fundamentally, every expression, every formulation, whatever it may be, is a symbol of the thought which it expresses outwardly. In this sense, language itself is nothing other than symbolism. There can be no opposition, therefore, between the use of words and the use of figurative symbols; rather, these two modes of expression should be complementary one to another (moreover, they may in fact be combined, for primitively writing is ideographic and sometimes, as in China, it has always retained this characteristic). Generally speaking, the form of language is analytical and 'discursive', as is human reason of which it is the true and fitting instrument and the flow of which it reproduces as exactly as possible. On the contrary, symbolism in the strict sense is essentially synthetic and thereby as it were intuitive, which makes it more apt than language to serve as a support for intellectual intuition which is above reason, and which must not be confused with that lower intuition to which numerous contemporary philosophers so often refer. Consequently, if one is not content merely to note a difference and if one wishes to speak of superiority, this superiority, whatever some may claim, will lie

with synthetic symbolism which opens the way to truly unlimited conceptual possibilities. Language, on the contrary, fraught as it is with more definite and less supple meanings, always sets more or less narrow limits for the understanding.

Therefore let no one say that symbolism is good only for the common man; it would be true to say the opposite; or better still, symbolism is equally good for all, because it helps everyone to understand the truth in question more or less completely and more or less profoundly, each according to the nature of his intellectual possibilities. It is thus that the highest truths, which would not be communicable or transmissible by any other means, can be communicated up to a certain point when they are, so to speak, incorporated in symbols which will hide them for many, no doubt, but which will manifest them in all their splendour to the eyes of those who can see.

Does this amount to saying that the use of symbols is a necessity? A distinction must be made here: as such and in an absolute way, no outward form is necessary; all are equally contingent and accidental in relation to that which they express or represent. Thus, according to the teachings of the Hindus, any figure, a statue for example which symbolizes this or that aspect of the Divinity, must be considered only as a ‘support’, a reference point for meditation. It is therefore simply an aid and nothing more. A Vedic text makes a comparison in this respect which perfectly clarifies the function of symbols and of outward forms in general: these forms are like the horse which enables a man to make a journey more rapidly and with much less trouble than if he had to

go on foot. No doubt, if this man did not have a horse at his disposal he could, in spite of everything, reach his goal; but with how much more difficulty! If he could avail himself of a horse it would indeed be a mistake to refuse it on the pretext that it is more worthy not to have recourse to any aid. Do not the detractors of symbolism act precisely in this way? And though there is never an absolute impossibility of making the journey on foot, however long and difficult it be, there may none the less exist a truly practical impossibility of reaching the goal in this way. It is thus with rites and symbols: they are not necessary in an absolute sense; but they are, as it were, indispensable by a necessity of convenience or expediency, given the conditions of human nature.[2]
But it is not enough to consider symbolism from the human side as we have been doing up to this point. To be fully understood, it must be looked at as well, if one may say so, from the divine side. Already, once it be accepted that symbolism has its basis in the very nature of beings and things, that it is in perfect conformity with the laws of this nature, and if it be borne in mind that natural laws are basically only an expression and as it were an exteriorisation of the divine Will—does this not authorize us to affirm that symbolism is of 'non-human' origin, as the Hindus say; or in other words, that its principle goes further back and higher than humanity?
It is not without reason that, in reference to

2 [A parallel text of St Thomas Aquinas can be cited: 'A thing may be necessary to a given end in two ways. First, as that without which it is absolutely impossible to attain the end: thus nourishment is necessary in order to conserve life. In another way, as that by which one better and more conveniently attains this end: thus the horse is necessary for travel' (Summa Theologica III q 1, a 2). This caused the Rev Anizan to write: 'Sicut equus necessarius est ad iter, say the Vedas and the Summa Theologica' (Regnabit, November 1925)]

symbolism, the first words of St John's Gospel have been quoted.[3] 'In the beginning was the Word'. The Word, the Logos, is at once Thought and Word; in Himself, He is the Divine Intellect, which is the 'place of possibilities'; in relation to us, He is manifested or expressed by Creation, in which are realised in actual existence certain of those possibilities which, as essences, are contained in Him from all eternity. Creation is the work of the Word; it is also, and by this very fact, His manifestation, his outward affirmation; and this is why the world is like a divine language for those who know how to understand it: Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei (The heavens declare the glory of God, Ps. XIX: 2). The philosopher Berkeley was not wrong, therefore, when he said that the world is 'the language that the infinite Spirit speaks to finite spirits'; but he was wrong to believe that this language is only a collection of arbitrary signs, for in reality there is nothing arbitrary even in human language, every signification at the origin necessarily having its basis in some natural conformity or harmony between the sign and the signified. It is because Adam had received from God the knowledge of the nature of all living beings that he was able to give them their names (Genesis n: 19, 20); and all the ancient traditions are in agreement that the true name of a being is one with its nature or its very essence.

If the Word is Thought inwardly and Word outwardly, and if the world is the result of the Divine Word offered at the beginning of time, then nature in its entirety can be taken as a symbol of supernatural reality. Everything that exists, whatever its mode,

3 [The Rev Anizan at the beginning of the article in Regnabit, November 1925.]

having its principle in the Divine Intellect, translates or represents this principle in its own way and according to its own order of existence; and thus, from one order to another, all things are linked and correspond with each other so that they cooperate towards the universal and total harmony, which is like a reflection of the divine Unity itself. This correspondence is the veritable basis of symbolism and this is why the laws of a lower domain can always be taken to symbolise realities of a higher order, where they have the profound reason for their existence, the cause which is both their principle and their end. Let us call attention to the error of the modern 'naturalistic' interpretations of ancient traditional doctrines, interpretations which purely and simply reverse the hierarchy of relationships between the different orders of reality. For example, symbols or myths have never had the function of representing the movement of the stars. The truth, rather, is that one often finds therein figures that are inspired by these movements and destined to express analogically something altogether different, because the laws of the movements of the heavens express physically the metaphysical principles on which they depend. The lower can symbolise the higher, but the inverse is impossible. Moreover, if the symbol was not itself nearer the sensible order than what it represents, how could it fulfil the function for which it is destined? In nature the sensible can symbolise the suprasensible; the natural order in its entirety can in its turn be a symbol of the divine order. On the other hand, to consider more particularly man himself, is it not legitimate to say that he also is a symbol by the very fact that he is 'created in the image of God' (Genesis

I, 26, 27)? Let us add that nature is given its full significance only if it is looked at as offering us a means of rising up to the knowledge of divine truths, which is precisely the essential function which we have recognized in symbolism.[4]

These considerations could be developed almost indefinitely, but we prefer to leave to each one the responsibility of making this development by an effort of personal reflection, for nothing could be more profitable. Like the symbols which are their theme, these notes should only serve as a starting point for meditation. Moreover, words can express only imperfectly what there is question of here. Nevertheless there is still an aspect of the question—and not one of the least importance—that we shall now briefly try to make clear or at least provide a glimpse of.

The Divine Word is expressed in Creation, we said, and this is comparable, analogically speaking and bearing in mind all due proportions, to thought being expressed in forms (there is no longer need here to distinguish between language and symbolism in this strict sense) which at one and the same time veil and manifest it. The primordial revelation which is, like Creation, a work of the Word, is itself incorporated, so to speak, in symbols which have been transmitted from age to age ever since the origin of humanity; and this process, too, is analogous to that of Creation

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4 Perhaps it would be useful to note that this point of view, according to which nature is considered a symbol of the supernatural, is in no way new and that on the contrary it was widely entertained in the Medieval period. It was, for example, that of the Franciscan school, and in particular of St Bonaventura. Let it be noted also that analogy, in the Thomistic sense of the word, which allows one to ascend from the knowledge of creatures to that of God is nothing but a symbolic mode of expression based on the correspondence between the natural and the supernatural orders.

itself. On the other hand, can one not see in this incorporation into symbols of the ‘non-human’ tradition, a kind of anticipated image, a kind of ‘prefiguration’ of the incarnation of the Word? And does this not also enable us to see, in a certain measure, the mysterious relationship existing between the Creation and the incarnation which is its consummation?

We will end by a last remark relative to the importance of the universal symbol of the Heart and more particularly of the form which it takes in the Christian tradition, that of the Sacred Heart. If symbolism in its essence conforms strictly to the ‘divine plan’, and if the Sacred Heart is the centre of the being, both really and symbolically, this symbol of the Heart, itself or in its equivalents, must occupy a central place[5] in all doctrines issuing more or less directly from the Primordial Tradition. It is this that we will try to show in some of the studies which follow.[6]

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5 [The author added here a reference to the quite central place occupied by the heart in the middle of the planetary and zodiacal circles in an astronomical carving of Saint-Denis d’Orques (Sarthe), which was sculpted by a Carthusian towards the end of the fifteenth century. The figure had been previously reproduced by L. Charbonneau-` in Regnabit, February 1924; see also Le Bestiaire du Christ, p. 102 (Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1940). This will be discussed further in ch. 71].

6 [René Guénon had already discussed the heart as centre of the being, and more especially as ‘abode of Brahma’ or ‘residence of Ātmā’ in Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta (1925); in the context of Regnabit, where he never made references to his works on Hinduism, he took up this subject again.]

6
SACRAMENTS AND INITIATIC RITES

From "Perspectives on Initiation"

We said earlier that religious rites and initiatic rites are of essentially different orders and that they cannot have the same goal, this being a necessary result of the distinction between the exoteric and esoteric domains to which they respectively belong. If confusions arise between them in some minds, they are due above all to a misunderstanding of this distinction, and perhaps in part to similarities that in spite of everything exist between these rites, at least in their outward forms, which can deceive those who observe things only 'from outside'. Nonetheless, the distinction is perfectly clear once it is a question of strictly religious rites, which are exoteric by definition and consequently brook no doubt; however, it must be said that doubts may arise in other cases, as in a tradition where there is no division between an exoterism and an esoterism, constituting as it were two separate aspects of the tradition, but only between different degrees of knowledge, where the transition from one to another can be almost imperceptible, as with the Hindu tradition in particular. This gradual transition will naturally show itself in the corresponding rites, so that in certain respects some of them may have a somewhat mixed

or intermediate character.
It is precisely in the Hindu tradition that one finds rites concerning which one can legitimately ask whether or not they are initiatic; we mean the upanayana, that is, the rite by which an individual is effectively joined to one of the three higher castes, to which, before this rite is accomplished, he belongs only in what can be called an altogether potential fashion. This case in fact merits close examination, and for this it will be necessary in the first place to understand exactly what is intended by the word samskāra, usually translated as ‘sacrament’. This translation seems to us far from satisfactory, for according to a tendency too common among Westerners it affirms an identity between things that, if comparable in certain respects, are nonetheless very different in fact. It is true that it is not the etymological meaning itself of the word ‘sacrament’ that occasions this objection, for in both cases it is evidently a question of something ‘sacred’; moreover this meaning is much too broad to permit us to draw from it an idea that is at all precise, and if we were to leave things here, any rite at all could indifferently be called a ‘sacrament’. But in fact this word has become inseparable from its specifically religious and narrowly-defined usage in the Christian tradition, where it designates something the exact equivalent of which is not found elsewhere. In order to avoid any ambiguity it is thus much better to accept this usage and to reserve the name ‘sacrament’ to a certain category of religious rites peculiar to the Christian traditional form; it is then the idea of ‘sacrament that is included in that of samskāra as a particular case, and not the reverse. In other words, one can say that

the Christian sacraments are samskāras, but not that the Hindu samskāras are sacraments, for according to the most elementary logic the name of a genus belongs to each of the species it includes, but the name of one of these species cannot validly be applied either to another species or to the entire genus.

A samskāra is essentially a rite of ‘admission’ to a traditional community; and as one can immediately see, this definition is entirely independent of the particular form, religious or otherwise, assumed by the tradition under consideration. In Christianity this function is fulfilled by the sacraments, as it is elsewhere by samskāras of different kinds. We must nevertheless say that the word ‘admission’, which we have just used, lacks some precision and even exactness, and this for two reasons. First, if one limits oneself strictly to its proper meaning, it seems to designate the actual attachment to the tradition, in which case it should apply only to a single rite, that by which this attachment is effectively accomplished, whereas in reality there are in one and the same tradition a number of samskāras, from which it follows that the ‘admission’ in question includes many degrees or modalities, which generally correspond to the principal phases of an individual’s life; on the other hand, this same word ‘admission’ can convey the idea of a relationship that remains in a sense outward, as if it were simply a matter of joining a ‘group’ or a ‘society’, whereas what is involved is of an entirely different order and implies an assimilation that could be called ‘organic’, for it involves a true ‘transmutation (abhisambhava) of the subtle elements of the individuality. For samskāra,

A.K. Coomaraswamy has proposed the word ‘integration’, which seems to us preferable to ‘admission’ from both points of view, for it exactly translates the idea of assimilation; besides, it is easy to understand that an ‘integration’ can be more or Jess deep and complete and that, consequently, it could be accomplished by degrees, which accounts for the multiplicity of samskāra within one and the same tradition.

It should be noted that a ‘transmutation’ such as that just spoken of takes place not only in the samskāras but also in initiatic rites (dīkshā)[1] this is one of the characteristics that both share and which allows them to be compared in certain respects, whatever their essential differences may be. In both cases there is the transmission or communication of a spiritual influence, and it is this influence, ‘infused’ so to speak by the rite, that produces in the individual the ‘transmutation’ in question. But it goes without saying that the effects can be limited to this or that domain, depending on the particular goal of the rite being considered; and it is precisely by their goal, and so also by the domain or order of possibilities in which they operate, that initiatic rites differ profoundly from all others.

On the other hand, the most apparent outward difference, and thus the one that ought to be most

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1 In Sanskrit, the word dīkshā properly means ‘initiation’, although it sometimes has to be translated rather as ‘consecration’ (regarding these two ideas, refer to what we said above about the different meanings of the Greek word mueo). Thus in certain cases, for example when a person offers a sacrifice, the ‘consecration’ designated by the word dīkshā has a temporary effect, valid only during the sacrifice itself, and must be renewed if the same person later offers another sacrifice, even if it is of the same sort as the first. It is therefore impossible to see in this ‘consecration’ an initiation in the true sense of the word, for as we have already said, every initiation is necessarily something permanent that is acquired once and for all and can never be lost under any circumstances.

easily recognized, even by those observing ‘from the outside’, is that the samskāras are common to all the individuals belonging to a tradition, that is to say, in the final analysis, to all those belonging to a given ‘milieu’, something that gives these rites what can properly be called a ‘social’ aspect, whereas initiatic rites on the contrary require certain particular qualifications and are reserved for a more or less restricted elite. From this one can see the error of ethnologists and sociologists who unthinkingly apply the term ‘initiation’ (the true meaning and real implications of which they evidently have no grasp) to rites that ail the members of a tribe or people have access to at any moment of their existence, and in particular when it is a matter of so-called primitive societies, In reality, these rites have no initiatic character at all but are true samskāras. Naturally, the same societies can also have authentically initiatic rites, even if these are degenerate to some degree (and perhaps they are so less often than one might be tempted to suppose); but, here as everywhere, these are accessible only to certain individuals to the exclusion of others, and this, even without examining things more deeply, ought to suffice to make any confusion impossible,

We now come to the special case we mentioned at the outset, that of the Hindu rite of upanayana, which is essentially the investiture with the brahmanic thread (pavitra or upavitā) and normally gives access to the study of sacred scriptures. Is this an initiation? It appears that the question could be resolved by the sole fact that this rite is a samskāra and not a dīkshā, for this implies that it is not considered to be initiatic from the point of view of the Hindu tradition, which

obviously must be given authority here; but again one can ask why this is so despite certain appearances to the contrary. We have already indicated that this rite is reserved for the members of the three primary castes, but this restriction is inherent to the very constitution of traditional Hindu society, and so it does not suffice to allow one to speak of initiation, any more, for example, than the fact that certain rites are reserved for men to the exclusion of women— or inversely —lets one attribute to them an initiatic character (to convince oneself of this one need only refer to the case of Christian ordination, which even requires other more particular qualifications, yet belongs no less incontestably to the exoteric order). Besides the one qualification we have just noted (designated by the term arya), no other is required for upanayana; this rite is therefore common to all the members of the three primary castes without exception, and it is even more an obligation than a right; now this obligatory character, which is directly linked to what we have called the 'social' aspect of the samskāras, could not exist for an initiatic rite. A social milieu, however deeply traditional it may be, cannot impose on any of its members, whatever their qualifications, the obligation to enter an initiatic organization. 'This is something that by its very nature cannot depend on any outward constraint, not even the mere 'moral' constraint customarily termed 'public opinion', which, moreover, can obviously adopt no other legitimate attitude than to ignore purely and simply all that relates to initiation since this is an order of reality that by definition is closed to the collectivity as such. As regards upanayana, it can be said that caste is only virtual or even potential

as long as this rile has not been accomplished (the only qualification required being the natural aptitude to belong to that caste), so that this rite is necessary in order for the individual to occupy a place and a given function in the social organization; for if his function must before all else conform to his own nature, it is still necessary for this nature to be ‘realized’ in order for it to be validly fulfilled and not remain merely an undeveloped aptitude. It is thus perfectly understandable and normal that the non-accomplishment of this rite within the prescribed period entails an exclusion from the community, or more exactly still, that it implies in itself this exclusion.

There is however yet another particularly important point to consider, for it is perhaps this above all that can lead to confusion. The upanayana confers the quality of dvija or ‘twice born’; it is thus explicitly called a ‘second birth’, an expression that also applies in a very precise way to initiation. It is true that Christian baptism, although very different from upanayana in every other respect, is also a ‘second birth’, and it is only too evident that this rite has nothing in common with an initiation. But how can the same ‘technical’ term apply at once to the samskāras (including the sacraments) and to initiation? The truth is that the ‘second birth’ in itself and in its general meaning is strictly a psychic regeneration (note well that it is to the psychic domain that this directly refers, and not to the spiritual, for this would then be a ‘third birth’); but this regeneration can have effects that are solely psychic, that is, limited to a more or less special order of individual possibilities, or it can be the point of

departure for a ‘realization’ of a higher order. It is only in this last case that it will have a properly initiatic scope, whereas in the first it will belong to the most ‘outward’ side of the different traditional forms, namely to that in which all participate without distinction[2] The allusion we just made to baptism raises another question that is not without interest. Apart from its character as a ‘second birth’, baptism also resembles certain initiatic rites by its very form; one can also note that this form belongs to the rites of purification by the elements (a subject we shall return to later), a very general category of rites that can obviously be applied in very different domains. But perhaps there is something more to consider here. Indeed, there is nothing astonishing in the fact that exoteric rites are modelled after esoteric or initiatic rites; if the degrees of outward teaching in a traditional society can be closely modelled on those of initiation, as we shall explain later, then with all the more reason a similar ‘exteriorization’ can take place in a higher though still exoteric order, that is to say with religious rites.[3] In all of this the hierarchy of normal relationships is strictly respected, for according to these relationships, applications of a lower or more outward order must proceed from those of a more principial character. Thus, if we consider such things as the ‘second birth’ or purification by the elements, to limit ourselves only

2 The limitation of the effects of regeneration accomplished in exoteric mode explains why it cannot in any way take the place of initiation or allow it to be dispensed with, although both have in common the character of a ‘second birth’, understood in its most general sense.

3 It should be noted that from this point of view religious ordination represents an ‘exteriorization’ of sacerdotal initiation, and that the consecration of kings is an ‘exteriorization’ of royal initiation, both being determined by the conditions in which the corresponding functions ceased to be reserved to initiates, as they were previously.

to these examples, it is their initiatic signification that is really primary, and their other applications must be derived more or less directly from this, for in any traditional form there can be nothing more principial than initiation and its proper domain, and it is in this ‘interior’ aspect that the true spirit of every tradition resides.

7
INTRODUCTION

From "The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times"

SINCE THE TIME WHEN The Crisis of the Modern World was writ-ten, the march of events has only served to confirm, all too completely and all too quickly, the validity of the outlook on the present situation that was adopted in that book, although the subject matter was then dealt with independently of all preoccupation with immediate 'actuality' as well as of any intention toward a vain and barren 'critique'. Indeed, it goes without saying that considerations of that order are worth nothing except insofar as they represent an application of principles to certain particular circumstances; and it may also be noted in passing that if those who have formed the truest judgment of the errors and insufficiencies of the mentality of our times have generally maintained toward them a purely negative attitude, or have only departed from that attitude to propose virtually insignificant remedies quite inadequate to cope with the growing disorder in all domains, it is because a knowledge of true principles has been just as lacking in their case as it has been in the case of those who have persisted in admiring a so-called 'progress' and in deluding themselves as to its fatal outcome. Besides, even from a purely disinterested and 'theoretical' point of view, it is not enough to denounce errors and to show them up for ~what they really are; useful though that may be, it is still more

interesting and instructive to explain them, that is to say to investigate how and why they have come about; for everything that has any kind of existence, even error, has necessarily its reason for existence,and disorder itself must in the end find its place among the elements of universal order. Thus, whereas the modern world considered in itself is an anomaly and even a sort of monstrosity, it is no less true that, when viewed in relation to the whole historical cycle of which it is a part, it corresponds exactly to the conditions pertaining to a certain phase of that cycle, the phase that the Hindu tradition specifies as the final period of the Kali-Yuga. It is these conditions, arising as a consequence of the development of the cycle's manifestation,that have determined its peculiar characteristics, and from this point of view it is clear that the present times could not be otherwise than they actually are. Nonetheless, it is evident that if disorder is to be seen as an element of order, or if error is to be reduced to a partial and distorted aspect of some truth, it is necessary to place one-self above the level of the contingencies of the domain to which that disorder and those errors as such belong; similarly, in order to grasp the true significance of the modern world in the light of the cyclical laws governing the development of the present terrestrial humanity,it is necessary to be entirely detached from the mentality that is its special characteristic and to avoid being affected by it in the least degree. This is the more evident in that the said mentality implies of necessity, and as it were by definition, a complete ignorance of the laws in question, as well as of all other truths which, being more or less directly derived from transcendent

principles, are essentially part of traditional knowledge; all characteristically modern conceptions are, consciously or unconsciously, a direct and unqualified denial of that knowledge. For some time past the author has had it in mind to follow up the Crisis of the Modern World with a work of a more strictly ‘doctrinal character, in order to set out with more precision certain aspects of the explanation of the present period given in the earlier book, inconformity with the strictly traditional point of view, which will always be adhered to; in the present case it is, for the very reasons already given, not merely the only valid point of view, but it might even be said to be the only point of view possible, since no such explanation could be imagined apart from it. Various circumstances have delayed the realization of that project up till now, but this is beside the point for anyone who is sure that everything that must happen necessarily happens in its due time, and often in ways both unforeseen and completely independent of our will. The feverish haste with which our contemporaries approach everything they do is powerless against this law and can produce only agitation and dis-order, that is to say effects which ‘are wholly negative; but would these people still be ‘moderns’ if they were capable of understanding the advantages of following the indications given by circumstances that, far from being ‘fortuitous’- as their ignorance leads them to suppose - are basically nothing but more or less particularized expressions of the general order, an order at the same time both human and cosmic, with which we are compelled to integrate our-selves either voluntarily or involuntarily? Among the features characteristic of

the modern mentality, the tendency to bring everything down to an exclusively quantitative point of view will be taken from now on as the central theme of this study. This tendency is most marked in the ‘scientific’ conceptions of recent centuries; but it is almost as conspicuous in other do-mains, notably in that of social organization-so much so that,with one reservation the nature and necessity of which will appear hereafter, our period could almost be defined as being essentially and primarily the ‘reign of quantity’. This characteristic is chosen in preference to any other, not solely nor even principally because it is one of the most evident and least contestable, but above all because of its truly fundamental nature, for reduction to the quantitative is strictly in conformity with the conditions of the cyclic phase at which humanity has now arrived; and also because it is the particular tendency in question that leads logically to the lowest point of the ‘descent’ that proceeds continuously and with ever-increasing speed from the beginning to the end of a Manvantara,that is to say throughout the whole course of the manifestation of a humanity such as ours. This ‘descent’, as has often been pointed out on previous occasions, is but a gradual movement away from the ?·principle, which is necessarily inherent in any process of manifestation; in our world, by reason of the special conditions of existence to which it is subject, the lowest point takes on the aspect of pure quantity, deprived of every qualitative distinction; it goes without saying that this point represents strictly speaking a limit, and that is why it is not legitimate to speak otherwise than of a ‘tendency’, for,during the actual course of the cycle, the limit can never be

reached since it is as it were outside and beneath any existence, either realized or even realizable. We come now to a matter of particular importance which must be established from the outset, both in order to avoid possible misconceptions and in order to dispose in advance of a possible source of delusion, namely the fact that, by virtue of the law of analogy, the lowest point is as it were the obscure reflection or the inverted image of the highest point, from which follows the consequence,paradoxical only in appearance, that the most complete absence of all principle implies a sort of ‘counterfeit’ of the principle itself,something that has been expressed in a ‘theological’ form in the words ‘satan is the ape of God.’ A proper appreciation of this fact can help greatly toward the understanding of some of the darkest enigmas of the modern world, enigmas which that world itself denies because though it carries them in itself it is incapable of perceiving them, and because this denial is an indispensable condition for the maintenance of the special mentality whereby it exists. If our contemporaries as a whole could see what it is that is guiding them and where they are really going, the modern world would at once cease to exist as such, for the ‘rectification’ that has often been alluded to in the author’s other works could not fail to come about through that very circumstance; on the other hand, since this ‘rectification’ presupposes arrival at the point at which the ‘descent’ is completely accomplished, where ‘the wheel stops turning’- at least for the instant marking the passage from one cycle to another- it is necessary to conclude that, until this point is actually attained, it is impossible that these things should be understood by

men in general, but only by the small number of those who are destined to pre-pare, in one way or in another, the germs of the future cycle. It is scarcely necessary to say that everything that the author has set out in this book and elsewhere is intended to be addressed exclusively to these few, without any concern for the inevitable incomprehension of the others; it is true that these others are, and still must be for a certain time to come, an immense majority, but then it is precisely in the ‘reign of quantity’, and only then, that the opinion of the majority can claim to be taken into consideration at all. However that may be, it is particularly desirable before going any further to apply the principle outlined above to a more limited sphere than that to which -it has just been applied. It must serve to dispel any confusion between the point of view of traditional science and that of profane science, especially as certain outward similarities may appear to lend themselves to such confusion. These similarities often arise only from inverted correspondences; for whereas traditional science envisages essentially the higher of the corresponding terms and allows no more than a relative value to the lower term, and then only by virtue of its correspondence with the higher term, profane science on the other hand only takes account of the lower term, and being incapable of passing beyond the domain to which it is related, claims to reduce all reality to it. Thus, to take an example directly connected with the subject of this book, the Pythagorean numbers, envisaged as the principles of things, are by no means numbers as understood by the moderns, whether mathematicians or physicists, just as principial immutability is by no means the

immobility of a stone, nor true unity the uniformity of beings denuded of all their qualities; nonetheless, because numbers are in question in both cases, the partisans of an exclusively quantitative science have not failed to reckon the Pythagoreans as among their ‘precursors’. So as not unduly to anticipate developments to follow, only this much need be said here, namely that this is but one more instance of the fact that the profane sciences of which the modern world is so proud are really and truly only the degenerate ‘residues’ of the ancient traditional sciences, just as quantity itself, to which they strive to reduce everything, is, when considered from their special point of view, no more than the ‘residue’ of an existence emptied of everything that constituted its essence; thus these pretended sciences, by leaving aside or even intentionally eliminating all that is truly essential, clearly provethen1selves incapable of furnishing the explanation of anything whatsoever. Just as the traditional science of numbers is quite a different thing from the profane arithmetic of the moderns, including all the algebraic or other extensions of which the latter is capable, so there is also a ‘sacred geometry’ no less profoundly different from the ‘academic’ science nowadays designated by the same name. There is no need to insist at length on this point, for those who have read the author’s earlier works, in particular The Symbolism of the Cross, will call to mind many references to the symbolical geometry in question, and they will have been able to see for themselves how far it lends itself to the representation of realities of a higher order, at least to the extent that those realities are capable of being represented in a form accessible to the senses;

and besides, are not geometrical forms fundamentally and necessarily the very basis of all figured or ‘graphic’ symbolism, from that of the alphabetical and numerical characters of all languages to that of the most complex and apparently strange initiatic *yantras*? It is easy to understand that this kind of symbolism can give rise to an indefinite multiplicity of applications; and it should be equally clear that such a geometry, very far from being related only to pure quantity, is on the contrary essentially qualitative. The same can be said of the true science of numbers, for the principial numbers, though they must be referred to as numbers by analogy, are situated relatively to our world at the pole opposite to that at which are situated the numbers of common arithmetic; the latter are the only numbers the moderns know, and on them they turn all their attention, thus taking the shadow for the reality, like the prisoners in Plato’s cave. The present study is designed to provide a further and more complete demonstration of what, in a very general sense, is the true nature of these traditional sciences, thus bringing into prominence the abyss separating them from the profane sciences, which are something like a caricature or parody of them. This in turn will make it possible to measure the extent of the decadence undergone by the modern mentality in passing from one to the other; it will also indicate, by correctly situating the objects taken into account by each science, how this decadence follows strictly the downward movement of the cycle now being passed through by our humanity. Let it be clear however that these are questions nobody can ever claim to treat completely, for they are by their very nature

inexhaustible; but an attempt will be made to say enough to enable any-one to draw the necessary conclusions so far as the determination of the ‘cosmic moment’ corresponding to the present period is concerned. If, however, a proportion of the matters to be dealt with nevertheless continues to appear obscure to some people, that will only be because the point of view adopted fails to conform to their mental habits, and is too foreign to everything that has been inculcated into them by the education they have received and by the environment in which they live; nothing can be done about this, for there are things for which a symbolical mode of expression properly so called is the only one possible, and which will consequently never be understood by those for whom symbolism is a dead letter. It must also be remembered that a symbolical mode of expression is the indispensable vehicle of all teaching of an initiatic character;but, without even considering the profane world and its evident and in a sense natural lack of comprehension, it is enough to glance at the vestiges of initiation that still persist in the West in order to see what some people, for lack of intellectual ‘qualification’, make of the symbols proffered for their meditation. One may be quite sure that these people, with whatever titles they may be endowed and whatever initiatic degrees they may have received ‘virtually’, will never get so far as to penetrate to the real meaning of the smallest fragment of the mysterious geometry of ‘the Great Architects of the Orient and of the Occident’.As the West has just been alluded to, one further remark is called for: however far afield the state of mind that has been specifically designated as ‘modern’ may have spread,

especially in recent years,and however strong may be the hold it has taken and that it exercises ever more completely- at least externally- over the whole world, this state of mind remains nevertheless purely Western in origin: in the West it had its birth, and the West was for a long time its exclusive domain; in the East its influence will never be anything but a Westernization. However far that influence may extend in the course of events still to be unfolded, its extension can never be held ~·to contradict what has been said about the difference between the spirit of the East and that of the West, and this difference is none other than that between the traditional spirit and the modern spirit;for it is all too clear that to the extent that a man ‘Westernizes’ him-self, whatever may be his race or country, to that extent he ceases to be an Easterner spiritually and intellectually, that is to say from the one point of view that really holds any interest. This is not a simple question of geography, unless that word be understood in a sense other than its modern one, for there is also a symbolical geography;indeed, in this connection, there is a very significant correspondence between the domination of the West and the end of a cycle,for the West is the place where the sun sets, that is to say where it arrives at the end of its daily journey, and where, according to Chinese symbolism, ‘the ripe fruit falls to the foot of the tree’. As to then1eans whereby the West has come to establish that domination, of which the ‘modernization’ of a more or less considerable number of Easterners is only the latest and most vexing consequence, it has been made sufficiently clear in the author’s other works that these means are based on material strength alone, which amounts to

saying that Western domination is itself no more than an expression of the ‘reign of quantity’.Thus, from whatever side one looks at things, one is always brought back to the same considerations and constantly sees them verified in all possible applications. There ought not to be anything surprising in this, for truth is necessarily coherent; but that certainly does not mean that truth is ‘systen1atic’, as profane philosophers and scholars all too readily imagine, confined as they are within narrowly limited conceptions to which alone the word ‘systems’ can properly be applied, and which merely reflect the insufficiency of individual minds left to their own devices; this is so even when the minds in question belong to those conventionally called ‘men of genius’, for all the most vaunted speculations of such people are certainly not equal in value to a knowledge of the smallest traditional truth. Enough has been said on that subject in another place, for it has previously been found necessary to denounce the errors of ‘individualism’, for that again is one of the characteristics of the modern spirit; here it may be added that the false unity of the individual, conceived as constituting in himself a complete whole,corresponds in the human order to the false unity of the so-called ‘atom’ in the cosmic order: both the one and the other are merely elements that are regarded as ‘simple’ from a purely quantitative point of view, and as such are supposed to be capable of a sort of indefinite repetition, which is strictly speaking an impossibility since it is essentially incompatible with the very nature of things; in fact, this indefinite repetition is nothing but the pure multiplicity toward which the present world is straining with all its might,

with-out however being able ever to lose itself entirely therein, because pure multiplicity is situated beneath the level of manifested existence, and represents the extreme opposite of principial unity. The descending cyclic movement must therefore be considered as taking place between these two poles, starting from unity, or rather from the point closest to unity in the domain of manifestation, relatively to the state of existence envisaged, and gradually tending toward multiplicity, that is to say toward multiplicity considered analytically and without reference to any principle, for it goes without saying that in the principial order all multiplicity is synthetically comprehended in unity itself. It might appear that there is, in a sense, multiplicity at the two extreme points, in the same way as there is correlatively, as has just been pointed out, unity on the on side and ‘units’ on the other; but the notion of inverse analogy applies strictly here too, so that while the principial multiplicity is contained in metaphysical unity, arithmetical or quantitative ‘units’ are on the other hand contained in the other and inferior multiplicity. Incidentally, does not the mere possibility of speaking of ‘units’ in the plural show dearly enough how far removed the thing so spoken of is from true unity? The multiplicity of the lower order is by definition purely quantitative, it could be said to be quantity itself, deprived of all quality; on the other hand the multiplicity of the higher order, or that which can be called so analogically, is really a qualitative multiplicity, that is to say the integrality of the qualities or attributes that constitute the essence of beings and of things. So it can be said that the descent referred to tends away from pure quality toward pure

quantity, both the one and the other being limits situated outside manifestation, the one above it and the other beneath. In relation to the special conditions of our world or of our state of ~existence, these limits are an expression of the two universal principles that have elsewhere been referred to as ‘essence’ and ‘substance’,and they are the two poles between which all manifestation is produced. This is a point that must be explained more fully before going any further, for it provides an indispensable key to the better understanding of the considerations to be developed later in this study.

8

THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES IN ANTI-TRADITIONAL ACTION

From "The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times"

The material presented to the reader hitherto and the examples given should make it easier to understand, if only in a general way, the precise character of the stages in the anti-traditional action that has really 'made' the modern world as such; but it is of first importance not to forget that, since all effective action necessarily presupposes agents, anti-traditional action is like all other kinds of action, so that it cannot be a sort of spontaneous or 'fortuitous' production, and, since it is exercised particularly in the human domain,it must of necessity involve the intervention of human agents. The fact that it has conformed to the specific character of the cyclic period in which it has been working explains why it was possible and why it was successful, but is not enough to explain the manner of its realization, nor to indicate the various measures put into operation to arrive at its result. In any case, a little reflection on what fol-lows should suffice to bring conviction, for the spiritual influences themselves act in every traditional organization through human beings as intermediaries and as authorized representatives of the tradition, although the tradition is really 'supra-human' in its essence; there is all the more reason why the same condition should apply when only psychic influences come into

the picture, especially such as are of the lowest order, and are the very antithesis of a power transcendent with respect to our world, apart from the fact that the character of ‘counterfeit’, everywhere manifested in this domain,and to be referred to again later, makes human intermediaries evermore rigorously necessary. On the other hand, initiation, in what-ever form it may appear, is that which really incarnates the ‘spirit’ of a tradition, and is also that which allows of the effective realization of ‘supra-human’ states; obviously therefore initiation is the thing that must be opposed (at least insofar as any such opposition is really conceivable) by anti-traditional action, which tries by every means to drag men toward the ‘infra-human’. The term ‘counter-initiation’ is therefore the best for describing that to which the human agents through whom the anti-traditional action is accomplished belong, both as a whole and in their various degrees (for,like initiation itself, it must necessarily comprise degrees); and this term is not merely a conventional expression used for convenience to designate something that really has no name, for in its form and in its meaning it corresponds as exactly as possible to very precise realities. It is rather remarkable that in considering the whole assemblage of all the things that really constitute modern civilization, from whatever point of view it is envisaged, one is always driven to the conclusion that everything seems to be increasingly artificial, denatured, and falsified. Many of those who criticize modern civilization today are struck by the fact, even when they do not know how to carry the matter any further and have not the least suspicion of what really lies behind it. A little logic should, it

seems, be enough to indicate that if everything has become artificial, the mentality to which this state of things corresponds must be no less artificial than everything else, that it too must be ‘manufactured’ and not spontaneous; and once this simple reflection has been made, indications pointing in the same direction cannot fail to be seen in almost indefinitely growing multitude everywhere. Nevertheless it seems unfortunately to be very difficult to escape sufficiently far from the ‘suggestions’ to which the modern world owes both its existence as such and its persistence, for even those who declare themselves most resolutely ‘anti-modern’ generally see nothing whatever of all this, and that is why their expenditure of effort is so often a dead loss, or at any rate has almost no real significance. The anti-traditional action necessarily had to aim both at a change in the general mentality and at the destruction of all traditional institutions in the West, since the West is where it began to work first and most directly, while awaiting the proper time for an attempt to extend its operations over the whole world, using the Westerners duly prepared to become its instruments. Moreover,once the mentality had been changed, the institutions could be the more easily destroyed because they would then no longer conform to it; the work that aims at a deviation of mentality therefore appears to be really fundamental, and on that work all else must depend in one way or another; attention will therefore be chiefly directed toward it. It is a work that obviously could not be made effective all at once, although perhaps the most astonishing thing of all is the speed with which it has been possible to induce Westerners to forget everything connected with the existence of a

traditional civilization in their countries; if one thinks of the total incomprehension of the Middle Ages and everything connected with them which became apparent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it becomes easy to understand that so complete and abrupt a change cannot have come about in a natural and spontaneous way. However that may be, the first task was as it were to confine men within the limits of their own individuality, and this was the task of rationalism, as previously explained, for rationalism denies to the being the possession or use of any faculty of a transcendent order;it goes without saying moreover that rationalism began its work before ever it was known by that name, and before it took on its more especially philosophical form, as has been shown in connection with Protestantism; and besides, the ‘humanism’ of the Renaissance was no more than the direct precursor of rationalism properly so called, for the very word ‘humanism’ implies a pretension to bring everything down to purely human elements and thus (at least in practice if not yet by virtue of an expressly formulated theory) to exclude everything of a supra-individual order. The next thing to do was to turn the attention of the individual toward external and sensible objects, in order as it were to enclose him, not only within the human domain, but within the much narrower limits of the corporeal world alone; that is the starting-point of the whole of modern science, which was destined to continue to work in the same direction, thus making the lin1itation more and more effective. The constitution of scientific or, if preferred, of philosophico-scientific theories also had to be embarked upon gradually (and here it is necessary to do no more than to summarize

matters already dealt with);mechanism prepared the way directly for materialism, which was to mark the more or less irremediable limitation of the mental horizon to the corporeal domain, thenceforth looked upon as the only ‘reality’, and itself stripped of everything that could not be regarded as simply ‘material’; naturally, the elaboration of the very notion of ‘matter’ by the physicists had an important part to play at this point. This is the point at which the ‘reign of quantity’ was really entered upon: profane science, mechanistic ever since Descartes, became more specifically materialistic after the second half of the eighteenth century, and was to become n1ore and more exclusively quantitative in its successive theories, while at the same time materialism insinuated itself into the general mentality and finally succeeded in stabilizing that attitude, without resort to any kind of theoretical formulation; thus it became all the more diffused and passed finally into the state of being the sort of ‘instinct’ that has been called ‘practical materialism’. This attitude was to be yet further reinforced by the industrial applications of quantitative science, which had the effect of attaching men more and more completely to purely material realizations. Man ‘mechanized’ everything and ended at last by mechanizing himself, falling little by little into the condition of numerical units, parodying unity, yet lost in the uniformity and indistinction of the ‘masses’, that is, in pure multiplicity and nothing else. Surely that is the most complete triumph of quantity over quality that can be imagined. Nevertheless, while the work of ‘materialization’ and ‘quantification’ was proceeding (and by the way it is not yet finished and

never can be, because a complete reduction to pure quantity is not realizable within manifestation), another work, opposed to it only in appearance, had already begun, and it may be remembered that it really began concurrently with materialism properly so called. This second part of anti-traditional action had to lead not to ‘solidification’ but to ‘dissolution’; nevertheless, far from contradicting the tendency characterized as reduction to quantity, it was bound to reinforce it as soon as the greatest possible ‘solidification’ had been reached, and as soon as the said tendency had passed beyond its first objective and had begun to try to assimilate the continuous to the discontinuous, thus itself becoming a tendency toward dissolution. This is the moment at which the second kind of work, which had at first only been carried out in a more or less hidden manner by way of preparation, and in any case on a restricted scale, had to come into the open and in its turn to cover an increasingly wide field,while at the same time quantitative science became less strictly materialistic in the proper sense of the word, and even in the end ceased to lean on the notion of ‘matter’, which had been rendered more and more inconsistent and ‘evanescent’ as a consequence of theoretical elaborations applied to it. This is the condition in which we now are: materialism merely survives for its own sake, and no doubt it may well survive a good deal longer, especially in the form of ’practical materialism’, but in any case, it has ceased henceforth to play the principal part in anti-traditional action. After having enclosed the corporeal world as completely as possible, it was necessary, while guarding against the re-establishment of any

communication with superior domains, to open it up again from below, so as to allow the dissolving and destructive forces of the inferior subtle domain to penetrate into it. It is the ‘unleashing’ of these forces, so to speak, and the setting of them to work to complete the deviation of our world and effectively to bring it toward final dissolution, that constitutes the second part or second phase referred to. It is right to regard the two phases as distinct, though they have in part been simultaneous, for in the total plan of the modern deviation they follow one another logically and only reach their full effectiveness successively; moreover, as soon as material-ism had been established, the first phase was in a sense virtually complete and could be left to take its course in the form of a development of everything implied in materialism as such. That is the moment at which the preparation of the second phase began, and none but its first effects have as yet become apparent, but they have become sufficiently apparent to allow their sequel to be foreseen,and to make it possible to say with no exaggeration whatever that the second aspect of anti-traditional action moves from now onwards into first place in the designs of what was at first comprehensively described as the ‘adversary’ but can now, and with greater exactitude, be named the ‘counter-initiation’.`